



Lucille is one of many residents over the past 20 years who has received care from Central Florida Hospice of the Comforter.

# Seminole Shares

For Seminole County businesses the act of giving is a year-round practice.

BY KEVIN FRITZ



**T**here's an old saying that gets a lot of mileage this time of year: It's better to give than receive.

The truth is individuals, businesses and organizations throughout the 345-square mile county practice that adage year round, offering help to those less fortunate. And the need—both big and small—is there. According to the National Center of Charitable Statistics, there are more than 300 public charities registered in Seminole County, and that doesn't take into account the multitude of fundraisers, drives and raffles held by schools, police and fire departments.

To that end, there is tremendous work being done by chamber members lending support any way they can. Take for example, Brooks Rehabilitation, a nonprofit physical rehab center that treats patients with brain injuries, those

recovering from industrial accidents, sports injuries and individuals that deal with chronic pain. Their center is in Lake Mary.

One of the ways they give back to the community is by offering a program funded by its foundation for patients who do not have insurance or whose insurance does not cover the needed therapy. Last year, the foundation distributed \$670,000 worth of care to patients.

Kathy Sinn, center manager, is currently seeing a little boy named Paul, an elementary school student who had an accident that severely broke his arm and required surgery, which meant he needed physical therapy. Although Medicaid would cover it, no other center would take him as a patient because the reimbursement was too low. Thanks to the foundation, a day after meeting with Sinn, he started the first of 12 physical therapy sessions. "Without it," Sinn says,

"his elbow would never work very well. It was stuck at a 45-degree angle."

The Vineyard Wine Company, a new family-owned restaurant and retail business in Lake Mary, helps out whenever there is a need. They donate baskets and gift cards for auctions or participate in fundraisers, assisting groups such as Alaquia Lake Ladies Association, The Mustard Seed, and the Lake Mary Police Department. At the Lake Mary Heathrow Arts Festival, they don't just sell wine, they use the proceeds to fund various scholarships. "If it's a good cause, we try to take a part in it," says Erin Caneza, president of the company that opened last year. "We want to help everyone we can."

#### **FOR THE CHILDREN**

Chamber members Susan Logan, Logan Land & Homes in Sanford, and

continued on page 12

Beverly Winesburgh, president, Product Marketing Group, Altamonte Springs, are faithful members of the South Seminole Sertoma Club, donating their time and efforts toward the betterment of children, especially those attending the county's elementary schools. They spend all year raising money at golf tournaments, bowl-a-thons, and other fundraisers. While the majority of the funds go to the Missouri-based Sertoma Club headquarters for children with speech and hearing impairments throughout North America, the remainder supports a local Sertoma school program, which honors four elementary students a month from September through May.

"We choose the student who is most improved," says Logan, "not just the ones getting straight A's." Dubbed the Super Students program, Logan has been chairing the project for 15 years. "The children we honor at times are those who get swept under the rug."

Super Students pays tribute to one fifth-grader each from Altamonte Springs Elementary, Winter Springs Elementary, and Sanford's Goldsboro Elementary Magnet School and Hamilton Elementary Cluster Magnet School. Each child is recognized at a Sertoma Club breakfast meeting and receives a ball cap, a plaque and a check for \$50.

### **FOOD PANTRY, BACKPACKS & MORE**

The 21-year-old Insurance Office of America (IOA), headquartered in Longwood, may have 22 branch offices in nine states, but its heart is very close to home. The company sincerely believes that social responsibility and corporate philanthropy are the cornerstones of a successful company and community. IOA has been sponsoring quarterly blood drives since 2001, and employees have cooked monthly dinners for guests of the Ronald McDonald House since 2002.

Beyond those benevolent gestures, there is a chosen charity each month to support, says Debbie Gross, events and charity coordinator. The goodwill ranges from new backpacks,

school supplies and bike helmets for the Children's Home Society before school starts, to turkeys at Thanksgiving for the Christian Sharing Center. This past Sept. 11, they took lunch to Longwood firefighters.

This year, IOA is also reaching out to its own by establishing a food pantry for employees that can be accessed anonymously and confidentially. It is replenished by employees, as well as via small monetary donations and fundraisers. For the holidays, IOA is currently collecting non-perishable food items for a separate "Thanksforgiving Pantry" and will host a Santa's workshop for



any employee needing a little extra help with purchasing gifts for their children. "We try to do our best to lend our support to the community while not forgetting to reach out to members of our own IOA family," says Gross.

### **TEAM OUTREACH**

Laura Palermo, manager of community relations at the Lake Mary-based American Automobile Association (AAA), says the travel and car safety organization "does a little bit of everything" for the Seminole County community.

"AAA has a long history of public service," she says, noting it is involved with a multitude of fundraisers and makes a number of donations to organizations each year. But the crux of AAA's philanthropy is the generosity of AAA Team Outreach, a volunteer committee made up of associates who

plan an annual agenda of projects. Its annual baby shower—a two-week long collection supporting SafeHouse of Seminole and BETA Center—brings in car seats, booster seats, strollers and clothing for youngsters. Team Outreach is currently finishing up on a year-long fundraising campaign for the Make-A-Wish Foundation to make a child's dream come true.

One of the largest charitable projects and longest held traditions at AAA is the annual Holiday Tree gift tag program in which associates choose tags from the tree with "wishes" from the children at Boys Town, Children's Home Society and the SafeHouse of Seminole. In 2008, AAA associates provided more than 200 gifts for Seminole County children.

On the other side of the giving coin, there is one organization in town that is about to celebrate 20 years of receiving goodwill from residents and businesses in Seminole County: Central Florida Hospice of the Comforter. Through volunteerism and monetary donations, chamber members in particular have been instrumental in helping this organization of purported angels continue to touch so many people.

"Our mission and ministry have long been in Seminole County," says Marilyn Hattaway, assistant director of development for Central Florida Hospice of the Comforter, which is based in Altamonte Springs. "Seminole County is where we grew up. Our roots are very deep here."

All these examples of giving show just how much Seminole loves to share its resources. Businesses big and small know that giving back is always a win-win activity. "We make our living in the community. We've always thought it's important to give back," David Gierach, president of CPH Engineers, Inc. in Sanford says. The company has donated its services to many Seminole projects including the Sanford Westside Community and Recreation Center. "Why do we do it? Because giving is the right thing to do," Gierach says. And so it comes full circle. Giving might be better, but it's also just plain right. ■